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SUBJECT: Shiprider Agreement Nets Four Million Dollars for Kiribati

REF: 08 SUVA 000453

¶1. The High Court of Kiribati advised Deputy Chief of Mission Pruett on August 27 that it had upheld AUD 4.7 million (USD 3,967,743 million) of a lower court's judgment of AUD 5.1 million in fines against a fishing company for unlicensed fishing near Kiritimati (Christmas) Island in the Northern Line Islands. The hefty fines are the tangible first fruits of the shipriders program between Kiribati and the U.S. Coast Guard (reftel).

¶2. Discussing the then-impending judgment, Kiribati Permanent Secretary for Fisheries and Marine Resources Development Ribanataake Awira had told DCM Pruett on August 24 that fishing vessels operating in Kiribati are much more cooperative and compliant with Kiribati law and regulations than before. He directly attributed the improvement in compliance to the now-proven effectiveness of the shipriders program, which allows Kiribati law enforcement officers to patrol Kiribati waters embarked aboard certain transiting U.S. Coast Guard vessels and aircraft.

¶3. Awira noted that his ministry has a memorandum of understanding with Kiribati police to defray related police expenses and to reinvest a share of all shiprider proceeds in a trust fund established by Tarawa to help finance the operation of Kiribati's lone patrol boat.

¶4. U.S. Coast Guard District Fourteen in Honolulu, Hawaii, has entered into shiprider agreements with the Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau and Tonga, in addition to Kiribati. Nauru and Tuvalu have expressed interest in concluding a shiprider agreement with the United States, even though we cannot yet promise patrols. These countries see immense value in having an agreement, both as a deterrent factor and to increase revenue from fishing licenses.

¶5. In addition, Australia, New Zealand, and France are reportedly considering initiating their own shiprider programs, embarking local law enforcement shipriders aboard their patrol vessels transiting the region. Their programs would not displace the State/USCG initiative or limit the countries with which we want shipriders but would co-exist with the U.S. program to expand sea and air coverage throughout the Pacific.

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